NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

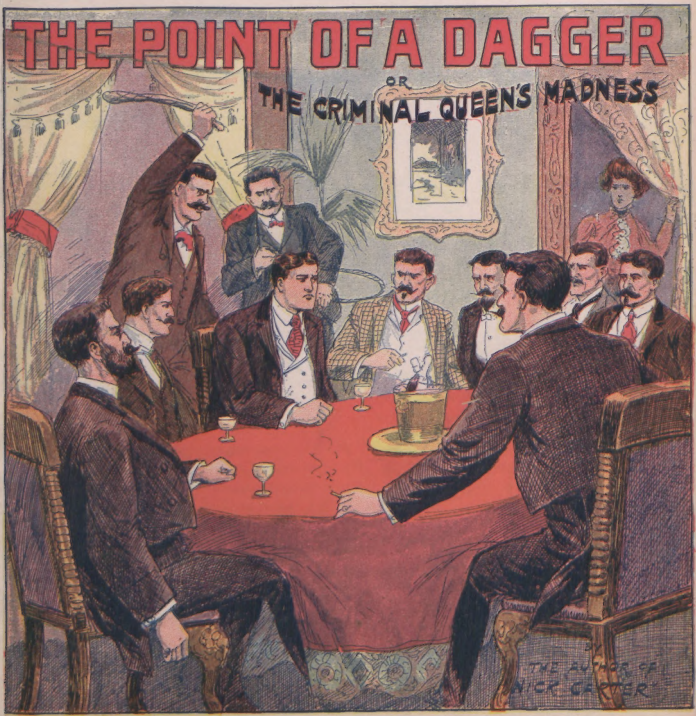
Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 412. Price, Five Cents.

THE POINT OF A DAGGER

OR

THE CRIMINAL QUEEN'S MADNESS



As Nick Carter leaned forward to speak to Del Puente, there was a swishing sound through the air over Nick, and a bludgeon fell with resistless force upon his head.

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The Point of a Dagger;

OR,

THE CRIMINAL QUEEN'S MADNESS.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A WOMAN'S INTUITION.

Nick Carter was seated in his study.

The day was Sunday, and the time was about an hour before dark. The detective had been enjoying a day of thorough rest, and had scarcely left that room since he rose from his bed, in the morning, save to eat his meals and return there to his books and papers.

Once in a long while there came into his experiences a day which he could denominate a "lazy day," and this had been one of them.

But it was destined to a serious interruption nevertheless, for there came a summons at the door, and Patsy appeared.

"There is a messenger boy downstairs, who has a note for you which he will deliver only in person," was Patsy's announcement.

"All right," replied the detective. "Tell him to take it away again or to give it to you, it does not matter which. If he cannot leave it with you, tell him I don't want it."

Patsy nodded and disappeared; but in a moment he was back again with the envelope in his hand.

"Is the boy waiting for an answer?" asked Nick, before he broke the seal.

"Yes; he is below."

"All right. I hope it isn't anything to call me out to-day. This is the first really lazy day I have had in a long time. How is the weather?"

"Raining torrents. You can see that from your window," replied Patsy, smiling.

"Oh, yes; to be sure; but you see I have tried to avoid looking out of my window to-day. I have wanted one day entirely indoors, and it will require something decidedly out of the ordinary to call me out to-night; you can bet on that."

He opened the envelope then and held the letter before him.

He read it through slowly, pondered a moment, and then read it a second time, even more carefully than before.

Then he passed it to Patsy.

"Read it," he said. "Read it aloud;" and Patsy, in compliance, read as follows:

"'MR. NICHOLAS CARTER.

"'MY DEAR SIR: The government of Peru, which I have the honor to represent, has instructed me to secure your services in a matter of vast importance to my country, and circumstances have arisen in connection therewith which renders it necessary that I should consult with you before twelve o'clock to-night. I appreciate the fact that I should have gone to you instead of requesting you to come to me, and such has been my intention until the moment of writing this note, when I find it to be impossible.

"'The fact is, I have delayed seeking you much longer than I should have done, owing to a serious indisposition which has confined me to my room—nothing less, my dear sir, than a serious attack of gout, which renders me incapable of traveling at all.

"'For this reason I have delayed seeing you, in the constant hope each day, that the next one would see me so much better that I would be able to call upon you.

"'Now, however, the moment for immediate action has arrived. The matter can be neglected no longer, and I am, therefore, put to the necessity of asking you if you will do me the honor to call here, at my apartments, at any hour this evening between eight and twelve, which will best suit your convenience. I fix the time between those hours for the reason that the gentlemen whom it is important for you to meet and consult, will be here then, and as three of them are booked to leave the city on the 1 A. M. train for the Pacific Coast on their return to Peru, you will understand the exigency of the case.

"'May I beg that you will return an answer to this request, by the messenger who takes this message to you, stating if you will accept the commission, and also at what hour—between the hours named—I may expect you to call.

"'Very truly yours,

"'RAMON DEL PUENTE,

"'Special Envoy for the Gov't. of Peru.'"

Below this somewhat effusive note, in the left-hand corner, was attached the address of the writer of the letter, which proved to be one of the high-class, hotel apartment houses situated on Central Park West—in a word, the Hotel Magnificent.

Patsy refolded the letter and returned it to the envelope.

"It strikes me that the writer is mighty careful to avoid telling you what the business is all about," he said. "Shall you go?"

"Oh, yes; I think so. I may as well get out for a little exercise."

"Ramon del Puente will probably want you to go to Peru."

"Well, he won't get me to go to Peru. Still, I can't very well refuse such a request as this letter contains. It is a very simple matter to go to the Hotel Magnificent for an hour or so. Bring the messenger boy in here, Patsy."

The messenger soon stood before the detective.

"Who gave you this letter?" asked Nick.

"The clerk at the hotel," was the reply.

"You did not see the gentleman who sent it, then?"

"No, sir."

The detective pulled a pad toward him and wrote a hasty note in which he said that he would call as requested, between nine and nine-thirty, put it in an envelope, sealed it, addressed it to Ramon del Puente, and gave it to the boy.

"There is your answer," he said.

"Shall you want me?" asked Patsy, after the boy had taken his departure.

"No; you had better wait up for me, however. I presume I will be back here by one o'clock or about

t time, and there may be something doing, you
w."

He resumed his reading of the paper then, and Patsy
t the room.

But the detective did not long continue engaged
th the contents of the *Herald,* for presently it dropped
y to his knees, and he leaned his head back against
e cushions of the chair, closed his eyes, and appeared
be lost in meditation.

After a little he roused himself, got upon his feet,
id looked at his watch.

"Half-past five," he said. "Four hours, yet, before
e interview with this man Del Puente."

Then he seized his hat, passed down the stairs and
t of the house, crossing the street to the opposite
de.

There was a face at one of the windows of the sec-
nd floor of the house he approached, and its owner
eemed to have been watching for the appearance of
he detective, for a hand was waved at him the instant
e appeared in view, and the face left the window.

As he mounted the steps of the house, the door
wung open to receive him, and in the aperture, with
er midnight eyes shining a glad welcome, and with
oth hands outstretched in greeting, stood Carmen de
Costa.*

"I have been watching your door for more than an
our," she said.

"Have you, indeed?" he replied. "It is only half-
ast five now;" and he followed her into the parlor.
"Are you happy here, Carmen? Do you like the
lace?"

"Yes, indeed. I can sit at the window of my room
nd see your door, you know. And that reminds me."

"Of what?"

"I saw a messenger boy enter your house not long
o, and I wondered if you were to be called away
mewhere, perhaps to the other end of the earth."

"Oh, no; I think not," laughed Nick. "Here is the
tter that was brought to me. You may read it if
u wish."

He passed the letter over to her and she read it through to the end; and when at last she raised her eyes, they wore a troubled expression which he was quick to discover.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"I don't like that letter," she replied. "There is an untrue sound to it."

"Nonsense, Carmen. You see ghosts in every shadow since your sister Inez so nearly assumed your place, and sent you away out of the country in hers."*

"No, Nick, it is not that."

"What is it, then?"

"I don't know what it is. When the messenger boy entered your house I felt a strange misgiving about his errand. A woman's intuition, I suppose. It seemed to me as if he brought a cloud with him, and I could not brush it aside. Later, when he went away again, and I saw that he carried an answer in his hand, the cloud became blacker and blacker. Who is the writer of that letter? Do you know the Señor Del Puento?"

"I never heard of him before."

"You do not even know that he is what he pretends to be? That is, a special envoy of the Government of Peru?"

"No; I do not know even that much about him."

"But you are going to call upon him at the hotel?"

"Yes; at half-past nine."

"I wish you would not go."

"Why?"

"Why? I have no reason save that I have feminine misgivings about it. The letter is insincere. It does not sound real, or genuine. It brings a black cloud with it."

"Nonsense, Carmen!"

"Possibly it is nonsense. I cannot deny that it is; but you know my intuitions are almost uncanny at times. I feel now as if you would walk straight into a terrible danger for both you and me, if you go to keep this engagement. Don't go, Nick. Telephone

*For the full history of Carmen de Costa, read No. 411 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "The Criminal Queen's Oath."

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or telegraph that you will be unable to keep the appointment."

"Carmen, where is all your courage? What possible danger could there be for me in a place like the Hotel Magnificent? No; I have made the appointment, and I must keep it."

"Break it, Nick; please break it," she pleaded. "If you go to that hotel to-night, something terrible will happen to you, or to me; perhaps to both of us. I feel it so strongly that I almost know it. It is in the air about me. Don't go. Please don't go!"

CHAPTER II.

A GHOST IN EVERY SHADOW.

The detective naturally only laughed at Carmen's misgivings, based, as they were, upon nothing more tangible than a mere supposition of danger to one or the other of them, or to both.

And a word here concerning some of Carmen's reasons for the position she assumed in the matter will not be misplaced.

Her twin sister, Inez, and her brother, Pancho, were both criminals; and although arrested by Nick Carter and delivered by him to the officers of the law, they had been liberated from custody and allowed to go free on condition that they would leave the country, never to return to it.

Nick, and the inspector had consented to this move, solely through consideration for Carmen, and the brother and sister, thus exiled, had been escorted to a steamer which had sailed away with them for South America quite two weeks ago.

Carmen, however, although she had strongly desired the liberation of her sister, was not without her own misgivings concerning what that sister might do in the future against herself, and against Nick Carter, whom she hated and against whom she had sworn revenge.

Those who have read the preceding number of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY will remember that the sisters were so exactly alike that it was next to impossible for their own brother to tell one from the other; also that Inez, who had been known as "The Crim Queen," had once succeeded in deceiving the detect himself by representing herself as Carmen.

And still Carmen had wished for the liberty her sister and brother, although she did not in heart believe that either of them—Inez especially would hold to the agreement to remain out of t country.

She believed that Inez would return to wre vengeance upon the detective if she thought she co do so, and also escape discovery and rearrest. S would not even believe that Inez would leave t country at all, unless she was escorted to the wha and the steamer which was to take her away wa kept under surveillance until it had departed with he on board.

And now two weeks had elapsed since the departu of Inez and Pancho.

The vessel which was to take them to Argentin must almost have arrived at its destination by thi time, and still, with every passing day, Carmen ha become more and more uneasy lest Inez should hav discovered some means of leaving the ship and return ing to the city of New York.

But this nervousness had never manifested itself s prominently as it did this particular Sunday evenin when Nick Carter crossed the street to the house wher she was staying, to pass an hour with her before go ing to keep the appointment he had made.

"Inez will return, I am sure of it," she said to Nick after a silence which lasted several moments.

"In that case, we will show her no more mercy, replied the detective. "She has had one opportunit to reform; if she does not make the best of it sh must take the consequences."

"I fear her," said Carmen, with the same porte tous shake of her head. "I fear her more now th she has disappeared from our ken than I did wh she was plotting and planning against you here in t city."

"But it was you, Carmen, who wished her to away."

"Ay; I know that. It was I. Perhaps that ve

makes me still more anxious. If she should re- and should succeed in doing aught to harm you, responsibility will be upon me."

Forget it, Carmen. Don't think any more about I do not think she will return; but if she should career will be short—and final. Not even for your e would I consent to show mercy to her a second ne."

"I should not ask for it a second time."

"And now, Carmen, let us be cheerful. Let's change subject."

"No; not yet. Not till I have entirely unburdened y mind."

"What! Is there more?"

"Yes; there is still Morris Curruthers."

"But he is in the death house at Sing Sing."

"I know; but I read in the paper this morning that s attorneys had succeeded in their appeal, and that would be released on bail."

"No, dear, he will not. The most that can be done r him, is that he will be taken from the death house d removed to another part of the prison. Later he ill be brought back to a prison in this city to await is new trial."

"But even that will give him an added opportunity escape. Do you suppose that when Inez discovers at his appeal has been granted, she will consent to emain out of the city, even at the risk of rearrest by ou if she returns here? Tell me, do you suppose at?"

"No; frankly I do not. I think if Inez discovers at his appeal has been granted, she will return."

"She must have known that there was an appeal."

"Of course."

"Then also, of course, she will have taken steps keep herself informed about the condition of that peal."

"Probably."

"Then, even according to your own admission, if e is not actually back here in the city at this mo- nt, she is on her way back—or is at least cal- ating upon starting back at the earliest oppor- ity."

"Well, what then?" asked Nick, smiling.

"This: With Inez back in the city, Carruthers' chances of escaping from prison are manifolded."

"Granted. But there is no reason to suppose that she is here—in fact, it is not at all likely that such a thing is possible; also, if she were here, and if there were a hundred others just like her, all working for the escape of Carruthers, I do not think he would stand one chance in a million of getting away."

"And yet, if he should——"

"Why do you insist upon that when I insist that it is impossible?"

"Because I wish you to be aware of the danger you will be in if it should happen."

"Pshaw, Carmen!"

"You never give a thought to danger, Nick, and you know it."

"If I should turn my mind to thinking about danger, as you regard it, I would have no room left in my head to think of anything else."

"But you admit that Inez is dangerous?"

"Certainly. Mighty dangerous; but more dangerous to you than to me, Carmen."

"I am not thinking of myself."

"I know."

"If Inez is here, or comes here, she will find a way to communicate with Carruthers, no matter how closely he is guarded."

"Probably."

"Both of them have sworn your destruction."

"Doubtless."

"Then, even if one of them is in prison, they are not foes to be despised, by any means."

"You are right about that, too; and yet, Carmen, we took that chance when we permitted Inez to depart."

"Let me finish what I was saying."

"Go ahead."

"If Inez is not here yet, but is still aware of the granting of that appeal, she is certainly either on her way here, or is preparing to come here."

"Well?"

"If that is the case, what is more likely than that

she has communicated with somebody—some of her friends who are already here?"

"I think it is quite likely."

"If you could be gotten out of the way before her arrival here, don't you think it would be greatly to her advantage?"

"I think she would certainly consider it so."

"Then, is it not likely that the suggestion would occur to her almost at once?"

"Yes."

"Or even that she thought of it before she went away at all, and prepared for it?"

"That is possible also."

"Well, then——"

"Well, then?"

"That brings me back to the messenger boy."

"Ah! does it? How?"

"I wish you would not laugh at me."

"I am not laughing, Carmen. But what of the messenger boy?"

"You do not know the writer of the letter he brought to you."

"No."

"This Ramon del Puente may be a mere tool of Inez's."

"He may be—but I hardly think he is."

"Still he may be so."

"Yes."

"You don't want any new cases now. I heard you say yesterday that you would be glad of a little rest. You need not take this case. You don't have to call upon Ramon del Puente."

"I would not have done so, if I had known that you would be so concerned about it, before I sent the note accepting the appointment. But now that the note is sent—now that the engagement is made, I feel that I must keep my word."

"Even if you knew that Ramon del Puente was working in the interests of Inez Navarro?"

"Why, Carmen, if I knew that to be a fact, wild horses could not keep me from that oppointment. While you have argued to keep me from going there, you have only succeeded in rendering me more d mined than ever to go."

Carmen leaned back in her chair with a sig resignation.

"I see that nothing I can say will keep you f going," she murmured, "but I cannot help thinl that you are walking into some kind of a trap. I only intuition; only dread; merely nervousness, I s pose, and yet my heart falters. I seem to see you wa ing into a terrible danger, and that danger lies thro the letter brought to you by the messenger boy. I will not ask you again not to go, for I see you determined. But be careful, for my sake, for I se to scent danger in the mere mention of the name Ramon del Puente."

CHAPTER III.

A TREACHEROUS BLOW.

The hands of the hotel clock pointed at twenty-f minutes past nine when Nick Carter, in the dress a prosperous business man of middle age, appear at the clerk's desk, and directed that his card be tak to the apartments of Señor Ramon del Puente.

He was requested to be seated for a few minutes the reception room, and there, presently, a boy car to him and he was conducted to a sumptuous parl on the tenth floor of the building.

He was left alone for several moments after entered the room, so that he had plenty of time observe his surroundings; and he smiled while mentally commented on this fact, for to him it w plain that the delay was created for that very p pose.

He was aware, too, that concealed eyes might watching his movements, so he seated himself i comfortable chair, with his back to the window, did not once alter the position of his head until curtains at the far end of the room parted to ac his host.

Ramon del Puente came forward with exten hand, and with a warm smile of greeting upon handsome face; and it was decidedly a handsome perfect in contour, olive in tint, and set off by flas

eyes and a symmetrical mustache which gave nce of great and patient care on the part of its r.

e was tall and well proportioned also, and Nick ght that he might have moved with the ease and e and litheness of a panther, had it not been for bandages in which his right foot was swathed, the accelerated limp with which he walked by the of a cane.

"I hope you will pardon me for keeping you wait-, Mr. Carter," he said, in a voice of singular soft-s for one so heavy. "I am such a sufferer from that it requires some time for me to get safely my feet; and even then, I hesitate a long time be-re I find courage to attempt to walk. Be seated, ease. Thank you; I will sit here."

"Have you been long in the city?" asked Nick, for nt of something better to say.

"Two weeks only. I was taken with this attack hile on the train, crossing the continent. Have you er had the gout?"

"Never," replied Nick, laughing. "I take far too uch exercise for that."

"I pray Heaven that you may never know the ter-rs of it, Mr. Carter."

"Thank you."

"Your fame as detective is well known to the Peru-ans, Mr. Carter."

"Indeed?" rejoined Nick.

"Yes. I have traveled all the way from Lima, at e express command of the president, for the purpose consulting you, and, if possible, securing your rvices."

"If the securing of my services means that you sh me to go to Peru," said Nick, still smiling, "let anticipate any confidences you might make, by ting that it will be utterly impossible for me to do t."

"Have you never visited my country?"

"Oh, yes. But I could not think of repeating my periences there—just now."

"Still, you are willing to give me the benefit of r advice, and perhaps you will also agree to send one of your assistants there, if it should be necessary?"

"Yes—I think so."

"The matter upon which I wish to consult with you is one of politics, Mr. Carter."

"Politics are rather out of my line," replied Nick, shortly.

"The politics of Peru are rather out of anybody's line, who is not familiar with the land and the people who live there," said Del Puente, laughing. "In a word, the fact is that what we call the loyal party—that is the party which supports the president—has every reason to fear that a revolution of enormous proportions is on foot to overthrow the government. The president has sent me here, chiefly in the hope that you could be induced to accompany me back to Peru, or in the event that you could not consent to do that, to request that you send a competent man in your place. I have only to add that if the question of remuneration would weigh in the matter——"

"Not at all, señor," interrupted Nick.

"But you will consult with us, and perhaps send somebody?"

"Yes; I will consult with you and perhaps send somebody."

"Then, may I ask you to step into the dining room with me? My friends and associates—the gentlemen to whom I referred in my letter to you—are waiting us there. Will you come this way, sir?"

Del Puente spoke English with a perfect accent, and his manners were as perfect as his words; the appearance of the apartment was also as perfect as it could be made, and thus far there had been nothing said which did not give the meeting the aspect of entire naturalness; and yet Nick Carter hesitated for one instant when he was requested to follow his host into the dining room, and into the presence of other men—he had no means of knowing how many.

He smiled to himself when he realized that he did hesitate, convinced that he would not have thought of such a thing if it had not been for the anxiety of Carmen over that very meeting.

Then he followed Del Puente through the private hall into the dining room at the rear of the building.

The room was an unusually large one for an apartment. The center of it was filled by a large round table, and seated there, awaiting him, were seven men.

"Seven and one are eight," was his mental comment as he entered the room; and then he added, thinking of the revolvers he always carried in his sleeves when he prepared himself for emergencies, "and five and five are ten."

The group around the table rose, to a man, when he entered the room, and each stood facing him, waiting to be presented. They were all of dark skins and flashing black eyes; all were of Spanish descent, but they might have been Chilians, Equadorians, or have belonged to any of the Latin-American nations for all that an observer could have told by their appearance.

Upon the table in front of them were bottles, glasses, cigars, cigarettes and refreshments in the shape of food, and Nick noticed even in that first rapid glance he gave, that a place had been reserved for him and that there was an uncorked bottle in a cooler, and a champagne glass in front of it.

"Gentlemen," said Del Puente, "I wish to present Mr. Nicholas Carter, the great detective, whom we have traveled so far to see."

They all bowed silently, although nobody uttered a word. Then the host turned to Nick again:

"You understand Spanish, I believe?" he asked.

"Perfectly," replied Nick.

"I am very glad of that. None of the gentlemen here speak English; and then he repeated the introduction in his own tongue, introducing Nick individually to each member of the party.

"And now, Mr. Carter," he added, when that ceremony was finished, "if you will take your seat yonder—the place is reserved for you as you see—we will get to business at once."

Quite dexterously for one so badly afflicted with the gout as he professed to be, he escorted the detective to his chair, and in a moment more he had torn the wire from the cork of the wine bottle and filled the glass at Nick's plate.

The detective thanked him, accepted the chair and placed the tips of his fingers on the stem of the g but he did not taste the wine, even though it had uncorked in his presence.

Altogether the entire proceeding seemed unusu him. He was not unfamiliar with the customs Peruvians and South Americans generally, and thought there was just a little too much ceremony nected with this affair.

Still, it might be Señor Del Puente's way, and was quite willing to await the happening of events

"We drink to your very good health, Señor C ter," said Del Puente, who had regained his own pla at the table, and who now stood there in front of chair with his wineglass raised in honor of his gue

The others, too, accepting the cue, raised the glasses, while every eye in the room was fixed up the detective.

"Thank you, gentlemen," replied Nick, in perfe Spanish. "You do me a very great honor. I ho you will drink with good relish, and at the same tim excuse me from joining you. It is a rule with m never to take wine when there is business to be tran acted; and if I am not mistaken, you have called m here entirely in the interest of a matter of business

He noticed, or at least thought he did, that ther was a furtive glance or two of disappointment aroun the table at his announcement, but the men aroun the table swallowed their wine and resumed their sea without a remark.

"I have already given you an idea of what we wi to discuss," said Del Puente. "These gentlemen a all personal friends of our president. They are all i terested in the preservation of our government on present basis. They have consented to come here w me, as representing the combined wealth of the co try, as I represent the president himself. So, now, —but first, let me ring for more sandwiches."

There was a call bell in the center of the table, as he spoke, he bent forward and struck it sharply th times.

"Sandwiches, eh?" thought Nick. He did not derstand why they should be wanted just at that

particularly as there was already a platter heaped f them on the table.

heard a door open behind him, and was on the of turning his head to see who had entered, Del Puente spoke again.

h, Manuel," he said, in a perfectly natural tone, l you bring in the platter of sardine sandwiches? r that, we are not to be disturbed unless I ring."

Si, señor," a voice replied, directly behind the de- ve, and he heard, or thought he heard, the sound tsteps retreating.

ere was a moment of hiatus, during which no- broke the silence, and then Nick plainly heard persons approaching him from the open door be- !

t the same instant Del Puente addressed a remark im which he did not entirely understand.

le leaned forward a little and was on the point of ing his head to repeat the remark when there was a shing sound through the air over his head, and ough he dodged and attempted to throw himself e side to avoid a blow which he instantly knew e falling, he was not quick enough.

The bludgeon, made of wire cable wound in rubber ds, fell with resistless force upon the top of his d; at the same instant a heavy cord was wound e around his neck, and as he sought to throw out hands in order to make use of the weapons in his ves, strong arms underneath the table grabbed him his legs and pulled him down.

nd then the bludgeon fell a second time, and the ts in the room seemed to go out, leaving him in l darkness and absolute silence.

e was stunned, unconscious.

CHAPTER IV.

BARGAINING WITH CRIME.

hen Nick Carter recovered consciousness he was in the same chair at the table which he had oc- before the interruption came.

there was a distinct difference now.

s true that the men with the Spanish names were seated around him in about the same relative positions they had occupied before the blow fell, but now they seemed totally to have forgotten his presence, and they were conversing together upon their own affairs with a freedom that was something, and which boded ill for the fate of the detective who was now their prisoner.

A prisoner indeed!

Strong cords had been wound around the wrists and ankles of the detective; and each, separately, was bound to the chair in which he was seated.

And that chair, as if it had been selected for the purpose, was provided with an unusually high back, against which his head was leaning; and there, still another rope was wound several times around his throat and then around the back of the chair, so that it was absolutely impossible for the detective to move.

Furthermore, he realized that not one of the men there appeared to have made any effort to bring him to his senses.

He correctly conjectured that after being struck senseless by the bludgeon, and half choked by the cord that was thrown around his neck, he had been thrust into the chair, bound there and left to recover his senses as he could—or die; it did not seem to have occurred to his captors to consider which effect the assault might have upon him.

His unconsciousness had been so deep and lasting, that he sighed involuntarily when the breath returned to his body, and thus made his captors aware that consciousness had returned to him.

And as he opened his eyes and looked about him, he saw that one by one they turned their own glances toward him, as if in recognition of the fact that he could now both see and hear, but beyond that they accorded him no attention whatever—no more than if he were still unconscious, or were, in fact, already actually dead.

"I've run my neck into a noose this time, sure enough" was his mental comment, when he realized his surroundings. "Carmen's intuition was correct after all. But still, even if I had known that it was correct, I would have come here just the same. There is no use in denying that fact.

"All the talk about the republic of Peru was assumed; all of it was a fake. And yet it was well done, and I must not forget that the surroundings would preclude a person from suspecting such an outcome as this one.

"I must remember that I am in an apartment of one of the most splendid hotels in the great city of New York. It certainly would seem absurd to believe that a man could be enticed here, and murdered in such a place, and his abductors and murderers escape scot-free.

"However, it is evident that they have made their plans with great care. Doubtless they have provided for every emergency which might arise.

"I'm up against it this time, sure, and I will need all my courage, all my stratagem and all my wit and strength to get out of this hole.

"I wonder if Inez is here in the city after all."

As if in reply to his mental question, the door behind the chair in which Del Puente was seated—the same door through which the detective had entered the room—swung open, and Inez Navarro stood there, looking in upon the scene before her, with a smile on her beautiful face—a smile which would have been as welcoming as the presence of her sister Carmen, had it not been for a sneer which accompanied it, and which it was impossible for her to conceal.

For a moment she remained there, motionless and silent, while each of the eight men who comprised the minions of Nick's captors turned toward her and bowed.

All remained silent, however, and it was evident to the detective that they regarded her as the master among them. They waited in silence for her to speak.

She permitted her eyes to roam from one face to another until she had studied each of them, and then her glance settled upon Nick Carter.

The smile upon her face did not change even then: but she came on through the doorway into the room, closing the door behind her; and she approached until she stood directly behind and against the chair occupied by Ramon del Puente.

"We meet again, Mr. Carter," she said then, [illegible] idly, as if she were merely greeting him.

"Yes," he replied; "although under rather [illegible] circumstances, I am sorry to say."

"And quite different circumstances also, as you admit," she continued.

"Quite so," he said.

"You hardly expected to see me here, did you?"

"I am always prepared for surprises where you are concerned, Inez."

"You doubtless believed that I was halfway to Argentina by this time."

"I certainly hoped so. Were you afraid that the climate might not agree with your delicate health?"

"Yes: we will call it that: or rather say that I feared the climate of the equator, which I would have been forced to encounter on the journey."

Nick nodded.

"You don't seem to be interested to know how I succeeded in returning so soon," she said.

"My delight in seeing you back again overcomes every other consideration," replied Nick, smiling.

"You say it beautifully," she commented, with a sneer.

"And with almost as much sincerity as Carruthers uses when he addresses you: eh?"

She frowned at that.

"Do you know where you are?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," he said.

"You will reply that you are in the Hotel Magnificent——"

"Pardon me, Inez, I was not intending to say any such thing. I intended to reply that I was next door to heaven, since I am in your presence."

She laughed aloud at that.

"Your reply is more than significant," she said. "I can assure you that you are much nearer heaven just now than you have ever been before—that is, supposing that you consider yourself good enough to go there—after you are dead."

The men around the table chuckled audibly.

"I suppose, Nick Carter," she continued, after a short pause to permit her last remark to produce

effect, "I suppose you would rather live than
ouldn't you?"
hat an absurd question, Inez!"
it absurd?"
r one of your accomplished wit—yes."
ll, there was a method in it."
have no doubt of that."
ou can purchase your life—you can buy the privi-
f living."
ndeed! For dollars and cents?"
o; but for a consideration."
You are quite a lawyer, I declare."
t a better bargainer. Listen, you can purchase
own life by giving me the liberty of Morris
uthers."*
don't quite see, Inez, how I could deliver the
s, even if I were to enter upon such an agree-
"
can tell you that."
Ah! You have figured it all out?"
Yes: it was figured out before you caught your
gs in the web so neatly spun for you."
What a spider you are, to be sure!"
If I will show you the way to secure the liberty
Morris Carruthers, and if your own life is the price
etting him free, will you bargain with me?" she
d.
I will reply to that after I know what you have to
"
Why does it matter what I have to say, so long as
one is easy to accomplish, and the other is the
of its accomplishment?"
All it a whim of mine if you like."
think, first, I should tell you what will be done
you if you refuse."
y all means, Inez. Let me have all the details—
particulars."
ou are in love with my sister, Carmen, are you

y dear Inez," said Nick, with a smile and an

* Master [illegible] appearing in Nos. 408, 409, 410 and 411 of the NEW CARTER.

intonation which he purposely rendered as insolent as possible, "how could you for a moment think that it is not yourself whom I adore, whom I worship?"

"I could almost adore you for your masterly insolence," she responded, with a shrug of her bare shoulders.

"You forget Carruthers, my queen of criminals."

Her eyes narrowed a little at this taunt, but after an instant she laughed.

"To proceed," she said. "It is not alone your own life which you will purchase by agreeing to my terms, but the life of Carmen as well."

"Two well-ordered and upright lives, for the mere liberty of a scoundrel, a liar, a thief, a murderer and a libertine, all in one," remarked Nick, in a musing tone. "Surely that is a high price to pay, is it not?"

She shrugged her shoulders again; but the frown on her brows deepened and the slits of her eyes narrowed again.

"I mean it," she said.

"Oh, I have not a doubt that you do."

"Will you bargain with me?"

"Perhaps—after I have heard the rest of your proposed bargain."

"I ask at your hands the liberty of Morris Carruthers. I offer you, in return, your own life, the life of Carmen Navarro y de Costa, and my promise to take myself and my followers out of the United States forever—never to return. Will you bargain with me?"

"But," said Nick, laughing, notwithstanding he thoroughly realized the desperate position he was in, "how are you to deliver what is not yours? How are you to deliver to me something which is Carmen's? And how am I to——"

"Enough! I see that you need to be convinced. You shall have a taste of what is in store for you. You shall be made to understand the consequences of your refusal, for I swear to you that Carmen shall be done to death before your eyes if you refuse to accept my terms. You shall see! You shall see!"

CHAPTER V.

INEZ NAVARRO'S AWFUL THREAT.

There was intense meaning in the eyes as well as in the voice of Inez Navarro while she was speaking, and although Nick was outwardly smiling, his heart was really wrung with misgivings at her threats.

He made no reply, however, but waited.

And Inez, after permitting a half minute to elapse for the sake of emphasis, touched Del Puente on the shoulder.

"Bring her here," she said.

Del Puente rose at the order, and went out of the room.

He was gone but a moment when he returned, and for once Nick Carter nearly forgot his self-control—he almost cried out in alarm, for the man was leading Carmen by the hand.

And it was Carmen. There could be no mistake.

Carmen, so like her sister Inez, that one looked from one to the other in amazement.

It was the first time that Nick had seen the two young women together.

He had, of course, seen them both many times apart; but never before had he viewed them as he did now standing side by side in the same room, dressed in the same style and texture, and provided with the same ornaments.

He could scarcely conceal his own amazement; and what was still more amazing than all, was the fact that Carmen was there at all, and that her costume had so soon been changed to conform in every particular with her sister's.

And there was still another thing.

Although Carmen walked without assistance, although she seemed to be perfectly conscious, although her eyes were open and she seemed to breathe regularly, she still walked and acted like one who is in a trance, and when her eyes rested upon the face of Nick there was no recognition in them.

She saw him without knowing him. She looked at him without recognizing her. She was conscious of her surroundings without understanding them.

Her face and her manner were both expressionless and emotionless.

"Carmen!" said Nick, in an effort to recall her to herself.

She turned at the sound of his voice and the utterance of her name, and for an instant there seemed to be some awakening emotion within her; but it disappeared as soon as it came into evidence, and she replied in a voice as expressionless as her face, and as if she were addressing a stranger:

"Yes?"

Inez laughed aloud.

"It won't work, Nick Carter," she said. "You cannot call Carmen back to herself, unless I give my consent."

"Carmen!" said Nick again, louder and more sharply than before.

Again there was that instant of awakening consciousness, and again, as before, it disappeared almost instantly; and again she replied with that interrogative:

"Yes?"

"One might suppose she was hypnotized," laughed Inez. "No, no, Nick Carter. It is something surer and more lasting than that. I have given her a little drink—something of the same sort that was in the wine you refused to drink when you entered the room. It is too bad that you refused it, too, for you might have saved yourself an uncomfortable headache, and, incidentally, we would have been spared a lot of trouble. Now, do you know what I intend to do?"

"I assure you I haven't the slightest idea," replied Nick.

All his self-poise had returned to him now.

He knew, since he had discovered that Carmen was already in the power of her enemies, that the situation which confronted him was much more serious than he had supposed.

He was surrounded by eight men, and a desperate woman, and he knew that there were at least two others in the apartment. The one who had struck him

id and the other who had seized his legs under able.

hez had lost no time in carrying her plans, what- they were, into effect.

e had been made a helpless prisoner in her hands: Carmen was already in her sister's power.

"Have you ever heard of the loco weed?" asked ez, after another pause.

"Surely you have not given that to Carmen?" ex- imed Nick, off his guard for an instant, in spite of self.

Again Inez laughed aloud. She seemed to be fond that laugh of hers; and it was a silvery little rip- e of amusement which somehow contained a sting d a menace. All things considered it was not a easant laugh to hear, especially under the circum- ances.

"No," she replied, "I have not given her the loco eed—yet; but I mean to dose both of you with it, you refuse to accept my terms. But, no. On sec- d thought, that would be much too merciful, for en you would not realize what you were suffering. o; I will not give it to her; but to you, I will give st a little. Just a wee little bit. Just enough to ake you laugh with glee when we put Carmen rough her tortures before your eyes in order to ex- rt the promises from you."

She raised one hand and pulled a breastpin from r bosom.

"See!" she exclaimed.

And then, before Nick could realize what she in- ded to do, she took a step nearer to Carmen and ust the point of the pin into her arm.

Carmen leaped away with a cry of pain, and Inez ghed exultingly.

Nick Carter strained at the bonds which held him, his face grew dark with anger; but Inez only ghed the more as she replaced the pin in her bodice. hen she turned to him again and spoke slowly and rtically.

"I know you better than you think, Nick Carter," said. "I know that all the tortures of the Co- and Apaches could not extort from you a whisper of pain, or a promise you did not wish to give. I give you full credit for all your courage and strength. I know who you are and what you are."

She ceased speaking for a moment, and then she continued:

"And I also know that you love this perfect sister of mine, and that she loves you. I know where your heart is tender, and where your resolution is weak. I know your vulnerable spot. I know how to make you suffer—how to make you wince—how to force you into treating with me for the thing I wish to accomplish.

"Oh, you may look unconcerned if it pleases you; but I know that my words fall upon your heart like lead weights upon your head."

She withdrew the pin from her bosom again with a sudden jerk, and plunged it spitefully into the arm of her sister; and Carmen leaped away with a scream.

"That is how I will bring you to your knees, Nick Carter," cried Inez, with a fiendish laugh on her lips. "That is how I will control you!"

"You devil!" said Nick, between his teeth.

"Ay, devil! You are casting me for the part I play best now. But you have not seen a millionth part of the deviltry of which I am capable. You may believe that."

"I do believe it."

"Ah! Are you coming to your senses? Are you getting into a mood to treat with me?"

"I am getting in a mood to forget that you are a woman, if ever I have you in my power again," said Nick.

"Ah! are you? The mood will do you no good. You will not have such an opportunity. You cannot break the bonds which hold you. I have taken good care of that. You are my prisoner, and my prisoner you will remain until you are dead, or until you have won your life and liberty in the only way you can win them—by giving Morris Carruthers back to me."

"But I cannot do it."

"Yes, you can do it. I know how you can do it. I can tell you how it can be done. And if you refuse——"

"Well?" said Nick.

"If you refuse I will torture Carmen before your eyes until you sweat blood with the agony you will endure. I will prick her with poisoned needles and tattoo her body and her face with such hideous things that she will be transferred from a beautiful woman into a monster. I will make her shriek, and moan, and cry with pain and agony, and you shall sit in full view of it all, and know that you—that you are condemning her to the torture I will inflict.

"See; she is unconscious now, but I will bring her back to the realization of things, so that she may understand what she suffers. She does not now know what is going on around her; she does not know you, or me, or where she is. But I will make her know. I will make her know."

Nick was again straining at the bonds which held him, but in vain.

The ropes were too stout; he had been fastened too securely; and the men and the woman watching him smiled at his efforts.

The detective knew that for once in his life at least he was utterly helpless.

His great strength seemed to count for nothing against the machinations of this fiendish woman who had captured him—and he began to think.

"What is the liberty of Carruthers beside the suffering which Carmen will be made to endure, if I refuse to treat with Inez?" he asked himself. "What is the majesty of the law, which I must defy, compared with——"

Then he held himself up with a sudden check.

"Yes," he thought, "but even then Inez would not keep her word. She would still torture and ultimately murder her sister, after she had accomplished all she wished through my assistance. She would laugh at both of us—and kill both of us with as little compunction as she would crush a worm under her foot."

"You are turning what I have said over in your mind?" said Inez.

"Yes," replied Nick; and that instant he resolved to temporize, if possible; to pretend, at least, to listen to her proposition to the end; to discover just what she wished him to do.

There would at least be a gain of time in that way, and in a situation such as confronted him time was a thing of value.

He remembered that he had told Patsy to wait for him; and he recalled the fact that since Carmen had lived in the house opposite his own, he had commanded of all his assistants—Chick, Patsy and Ten Ichi—constant surveillance of that house, lest harm should befall her.

He did not know how Carmen had been taken from that house, or by what means she had been brought here, but all at once the thought came to him that her departure might not have been unobserved, and that even at that moment Chick or Patsy—perhaps both—might be on the watch outside the hotel.

CHAPTER VI.

"LET HIM WHO DISOBEYS ME BEWARE!"

"Well?" asked Inez, after she had waited a considerable time, and still Nick Carter seemed to be lost in thought.

He raised his eyes to her and smiled, for he had decided that almost any course he might adopt to get the best of the bargain with this fiendish woman would be excusable.

"You seem to have got the call on this stack of chips," he said, with what he intended should appear to be the beginning of a compliance with her wishes.

"I am glad that you are beginning to see things as they are," she responded.

"I cannot very well agree to your terms until I know what those terms are," said Nick.

"Nobody asked you to do that."

"You have stated that if I would assist you to the liberation of Carruthers you would do thus and so, eh?"

"Just that."

"And thus and so means that you would set the men and me at liberty together, and that you will hear her no further, and finally that you and all your

ers—which I suppose includes this aggregation of undrelism, this agglomeration of gentility—would e the country, never to return."

"Precisely."

"Now, Inez, it is time to be frank with each other, 't it?"

"Just about."

"How do I know that you will keep to your word?"

"You don't know it."

"No; and I don't believe you will, either."

"But I will."

"Prove it and I will treat with you."

"How shall I prove it?"

"I don't care a picayune how you prove it as long s you do prove it."

"I don't know how I can give you anything more tisfactory than my word."

"Then I won't waste time by treating with you."

"Do you dare say that to me—now?"

"Certainly I dare say it. Why not?"

"Ay, why not?"

"You are quite as anxious to have your desires fulfilled as I am to get out of the fix you have caught me n. You are as anxious—more anxious, perhaps—for the freedom of Carruthers as I am for the safety of Carmen."

"And your own."

"Inez, understand me, if I were alone considered this matter I should tell you to do your worst at ce. I would not even condescend to discuss the matr with you."

"I believe that."

"Very well. See that you do not forget it."

"You don't believe that I would keep my promise?"

"No; you have already broken it once. How could ely upon it again?"

"You were a fool to believe that I would stay away m the city while Morris Carruthers was in limbo nd with his life as the price of his imprisonment."

"Perhaps so; but you must remember that I did not you credit for having heart enough to care, save your own skin."

"Did you not?"

"We waste words."

"I quite agree with you on that point."

"Prove to me that you will keep your word, and——"

"But I repeat, how am I to prove it?"

"I don't know. I only know that you must find a way."

"And if I cannot satisfy you on that point——"

"Then the discussion is at an end."

"Even with your life and Carmen's at stake?"

"Inez, I am bound and helpless; my muscles are of no use to me now; but my brain is as clear, or clearer, than ever. I am no fool to be used by you. I would as soon sacrifice my life and her's now—at once—without quibble or talk, as to take a chance with your powers of deception; and I would much rather do it than to make a farce of entering into terms with you only to be sent to the same fate after you had wrung from me all that you desire."

"Foxy Nick Carter, aren't you?"

"I am at least determined."

"Suppose I should give myself up to you as a hostage? Would that satisfy you?"

"It might. But I would have to be free in order to accept you as a hostage."

"Do you suppose for a moment that I meditated any other course than setting you free, in order that you might do the work I wish you to do?"

"I do not know what you have considered. You have not told me."

"I know that your word is as good as a bond, Nick Carter."

"Thank you."

"Oh, you needn't thank me. I know that if you make a solemn promise you will keep it."

"You are right about that."

"I propose to accept your solemn promise to do certain things which will lead to the escape of Morris Carruthers from prison. I propose—now—to place myself in your custody; to go to your house and to remain there a prisoner, if you will, until I am assured that he is free and out of the country. And I propose in the meantime to retain possession of Carmen."

"I see."

"Now you have it. Now you see how I can prove to you that I will keep my word."

"But you have not told me how you—or shall I say we?—how we are to get Carruthers out of the hands of the police."

"You are to do that."

"But how?"

"I have thought of a way."

"What is it?"

"He will be brought from Sing Sing, back to the Tombs, to-day, to-morrow, or, at the latest, the day following that."

"Well?"

"It would be an easy matter for you to induce the inspector to order that he be sent to headquarters for an hour or so of questioning, would it not?"

"Possibly; I do not say that it would, but it might be done. What then?"

"You could establish yourself as his personal guard. You could be the one who conducted him from the Tombs to headquarters."

"I might be."

"The inspector would not hesitate to place him unreservedly in your charge, would he?"

"Perhaps not. I cannot say positively."

"Well, I can. I know he would not demur."

"Well, go ahead with your plan."

"Why, it is very simple. Morris could escape from you while on the way."

"Oh, could he?"

"He certainly could if you permitted it."

"But where is the reputation of Nick Carter after that?"

"Bah! I am not thinking of your reputation."

"But I am."

"There is also your life to consider. Which is worth the most to you, your life or your reputation?"

"I should about as soon lose one as the other."

"But Carmen's also."

"True. I had forgotten that."

"What is your life or your reputation worth to you as weighed in the balance against her life and happiness?"

"Do I understand you correctly, that you are willing to accept my bare promise for the fulfillment of these conditions, and that in return you are willing to go with me to my own house, and to remain a prisoner there until we have accomplished all?"

"Yes."

"But suppose that Carruthers should not escape. Suppose at the last minute, through no fault of mine, he should fail to get away?"

"Then Carmen's life would pay the forfeit."

"But I would have you in my power, and——"

"Bah! We quibble, Nick Carter. In the first place you would not fail, if you should go so far as to agree to my terms, and you know you would not. If you were determined to set Carruthers at liberty you could do it. It is merely a matter of your making the promise, that is all."

"I see, Inez, that you understand me better than I thought you did."

"I understand you well enough to know that you are talking against time, even now; but that does not concern me much, for you are where time can do you no good. You may have all the time you require, up to to-morrow night. After that if you have not decided I shall proceed with my plans for revenging the death of Carruthers, even before his death takes place."

Again she touched Ramon del Puente on the shoulder.

"Ramon," she said, "take our friends into the parlor. Take Carmen with you. Amuse yourself as you please until I join you. I will finish this talk with Nick Carter alone."

He rose obediently, announcing to the others in Spanish what she had said.

Then, with a wicked leer in his eyes, he stepped close to Carmen, who still stood where her sister had placed her, in the center of the room, and before anybody was aware of his intentions, he leaned forward and kissed her on the lips.

Nick Carter started forward with a force which

ned more than anything he had done before st his bonds; but even before he brought the upon them, Inez had drawn a dagger from her and leaped toward Del Puente.

ere was a savage gleam in her eyes, and her lips tightened over her teeth like the menace of an dog.

er hand fell, and the dagger was buried to the n the throat of Ramon del Puente, who pitched ard at her feet, writhing on the floor.

'll teach you to take liberties!" she said; and then, , to the others, she added, in Spanish:

Carry him into the other room. If he dies, it is his fault. Take him away; and let the man who dis- s me beware! I am in no mood for trifling."

CHAPTER VII.

WITH A DAGGER AGAINST HIS THROAT.

Inez," said Nick Carter, as soon as they were e, "I never before saw a blow struck with a pon where I so thoroughly approved of it as now."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Those wolves need an object lesson now and then," replied. "If I had permitted such a thing to pass noticed——"

She paused suddenly and laughed aloud.

"These men fear me far more than they fear the il, their real master," she said. "I hold them in hollow of my hand. Not one of them dares to nt any insult I wish to put upon them; and these, k Carter, are only a few of the men I have under ntrol. And there is not one under my command would not slit your throat at a word from me."

"I can readily believe that, Inez."

"Well, don't you understand what an emphasis all gives to the arguments I have used? Don't you e it?"

"Quite."

"Then why do you hesitate?"

"Perhaps, as you suggested a short time ago, I am ng for time."

"Perhaps you are; perhaps you are not. I don't care whether you are or not. It makes no difference to me, for I know that time can do you no good."

"Maybe not."

"Do you think, for example, that I was followed when I took Carmen from the house where she has been stopping?"

"I had thought it possible," replied Nick, smiling at her penetration.

"Do you think me such a fool as all that? Oh, no; not quite, Mr. Carter."

"Haven't you an idea that the man you stabbed needs attention?" inquired Nick.

"You mean by that, that you would like to be alone for a time, I suppose," she answered.

"Yes," he admitted, "I do."

"You wish to think over what we have said."

"Yes."

"And you have an idea that if you are alone you might figure out some way of freeing yourself from the bonds which hold you; eh?"

"I might make the effort."

She passed around the table to where he was seated, and inspected each cord separately, and with great care.

"They will hold all right," she said; and then she leaned her lithe body against the table, close to him, and looked squarely into his eyes.

"I have no doubt of it," he said.

There was a moment of silence after that, and presently the detective asked:

"Why don't you go?"

"I was thinking," she replied.

"Thinking that it would be a good move on your part to set me free?" he asked, smiling.

"Well, not exactly that; but something very like it," she admitted.

"Indeed! You surprise me!"

"It is true, for I was thinking that I would like to set you free."

"Really? You astound me!" There was cold raillery in his tones as he said the words.

She still kept her eyes boring into his, and now she leaned a little nearer to him.

"Shall I tell you what I was thinking about?" she asked, with her face still closer to his.

"If it pleases you, yes."

"I was thinking what a pity it is that you are not more human and something less of an earthly god; what a mistake it is you are so incorruptible; what an error in creation it is that you have no wickedness in you!"

"Ah!" laughed Nick, somewhat uneasily, "you are quite mistaken. There is a whole lot of wickedness in me, as you would soon find out if my hands were free."

She leaned her face still closer to his.

"If you should tell me that if your hands were free you would throw your arms around me and swear to love me, and to love me only, forever and a day, I would cut your bonds in the twinkling of an eye-lash," she whispered in his ear, breathing hard. "If I could steal your soul out of your body and be with it as I willed, I would forsake all there is in heaven or on the earth to be with you."

"Even Morris Carruthers?" asked Nick, with cutting sarcasm.

"Bah!" she said. "Morris Carruthers might rot in prison, or burn in a cinder in the electric chair for all I would care—then."

"Really, Inez, you do it very well; but I am afraid you are fickle; no?"

"Oh, I do not expect you to believe me. I don't think I want you to believe me, or to take me at my word——"

"No fear of that, Inez."

"For I would do as I have said. Perhaps you don't know it, but it is true with natures like mine, that hate and love travel closely side by side. The things—the people—we hate the most fiercely are the very things and people we may at any moment love the most passionately. Yes; I would set you free if you said the word," she added, dreamily.

Nick made no reply.

Inez was silent for full another minute, and then she leaned still closer over him.

"I have a notion to kill you with a dagger or I stabbed Ramon," she breathed into his ear; you are bound and helpless. You cannot resist. rope around your throat will not permit you to your head so much as the fraction of an inch. hands are bound to the rounds of your chair, s you cannot raise them. Your feet are tied to th of the chair so that you cannot move them. Yo helpless. You are a babe—a mere atom in exist with no more power to control your great m than has the dust that has gathered in the corne the room; and you are a man.

"But I—I am a woman. A young and a beau woman, with all of life before me. With the so a giantess and the heart of adamant—until you p the shell, and then it is a molten mass, made to ship—made to love."

Her face was quite close to his now; it was w an inch of his own and he could feel her breath against him as she talked.

And he was powerless to move so much as the tion of an inch.

He was silent also, for he could think of not to say which would affect her in her present mo the mood of a madwoman, he decided it to be; that she was in a sense a madwoman he had n doubt.

"There is nobody here to stab me as I sta Ramon," she repeated; and then she kissed hi Ramon had kissed Carmen, on the lips.

"God!" she said; and straightened up as rigid statue. "How I hate you! How I hate you! you ever heard, Nick Carter, that the two extrem heat and cold produce the same effect on the tions, on the senses? I wonder if the extrem hate and love are the same."

Suddenly her mood changed again, and she s her right hand around against his cheek with sounding slap which rang out through the sile the room, and with a force that dazed him.

But instantly, when the blow fell, she sw down upon him again, and pressed her lips the spot of red where her hand had struck.

;onder if I could not torture you into becom- bad as I am," she said, moodily.

would rather you would torture me with hot s than with your lips," said Nick, angrily.

ould you? Would you, indeed? It is a good stion. I might try it—later. Just now I am in od for other things."

hen I beg that you will control it. I would prefer incers."

alk; all talk," she said. "See!"

e drew the dagger from her bosom, still stained the blood it had drawn from the throat of Ramon uente, and held it up before his eyes.

Well, I see it," he said.

How utterly easy it would be for me to end your er forever, now and here; eh?" she murmured, e as if speaking to herself than addressing him.

he placed the point of the weapon against his at, pressing against it so that it pricked the flesh drew a little drop of blood—and she held it there.

have more than half a mind to thrust it home," glowered, with her eyes close to his; and then she ed still further toward him until her lips touched as a feather might have touched them.

I am going to kiss you again," she whispered. ou are to return that kiss, or I will drive this dag- to the hilt into your throat."

Drive it to the hilt, and be——"

he could say no more, for her lips against his pre- ed further utterance; and she held them there for half a minute, while he tightened his own into lines.

nd she seemed to forget how hard she was press- upon the dagger, although he could feel that it was y but surely penetrating his flesh until he knew l was flowing from the incision it had made.

en, suddenly, she recollected herself.

th a convulsive shudder, she drew away from withdrawing the dagger at the same time.

l then she perceived what she had done; then she ered that the point of the weapon had made more wound than she had intended it should, although in reality but a scratch.

With a cry of anger, she threw the dagger from her with such force that when it struck point first against the hardwood door, it hung there, quivering and vibrating.

And with the same motion with which she cast it from her, she flung herself upon Nick Carter's breast, and pressed her face under his chin against the wound she had made. She was like a vampire that has drawn blood from the throat of its intended victim, and then swoops down to drink it.

Nick shuddered when he felt her lips against his throat; but he was powerless to resist. He could only sit there helpless, and wait for her mood to change.

Then, presently, after several moments, she raised her head again, and he saw that there were little red spots made by his own blood upon her lips.

And she laughed in his face. Her eyes gleamed like diamond points, and she pointed with her fingers toward her mouth.

"Your blood," she panted. "I have tasted it, and you are mine, mine, mine!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAN ON THE FIRE ESCAPE.

"Inez," said Nick, softly, for he was convinced now that she was mad.

"Yes?" she replied, and her tone was as soft and emotionless as his own.

"Will you give me a drink of water?"

"Water? Yes. Why not?"

She left him and darted to the sideboard, where she filled a glass with water and held it to his lips while he drank the contents.

"Thank you," he said.

She tossed the glass aside as if it had been made of straw, but it fell upon the soft rug and rolled away into a corner of the room, uninjured. Then she fell upon her knees beside him.

For a moment she remained in that attitude, now and then touching the slight wound in his throat with the tips of her fingers; and once she touched her lips to it

again, so that Nick thought for a moment that she was about to repeat the operation of a moment before.

But she merely touched him this time, and then sank back again so that she rested easily upon her knees at his side.

"Shall I cut your bonds and set you free?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Yes," he said; "if you will be so good."

"And then——" she asked.

"Why, then, I will take Carmen and go away; and if you will go with us, we will take you——"

She leaped to her feet with a loud laugh.

"Fool!" she cried. "You should know better than to try me too far. I have already told you that the line of demarcation between love and hate is a narrow one. I am disposed to love you now; beware that you do not make me hate you again."

"Then leave me for a time and let me think," he said.

"And will you think of me? Will you think of all that I have said to you?"

"You may rest assured," replied Nick, quite truthfully, too, "that you will be more in my thoughts than any other person."

"Then I will go. You shall be alone an hour. After that time I will return."

"An hour?" said Nick. "What time is it now?"

She looked at the watch which was pendent at her bosom.

"It is half-past one," she said.

"So late? How time has flown! In an hour, you said, I believe?"

"Yes; in an hour I will return."

She made no attempt to repeat her caresses, but passed around the table to the door, passed out and closed it behind her, without once looking back toward him.

And when she was gone, and Nick realized that he was quite alone, he breathed a sigh of relief.

"What good will an hour, or ten hours, for that matter, do me?" he asked himself. "I am utterly helpless. I cannot move an inch. One would think that these cords were made of wire, they are so tough."

He lapsed into silence, then thinking; and his thoughts were chiefly of Carmen.

For the moment he felt no misgivings concerning her, although she was in the power of the people who had so dexterously made him a prisoner; but the quickness with which Inez had resented the slight which Ramon del Puente put upon her, convinced him that she was safe, at least, from them.

Many minutes passed in this way—probably fifteen of them—and then he was startled into sudden wakefulness by a sound that seemed to come from behind him.

He listened, and after a moment it was repeated, but so faintly that he could locate it with difficulty; nevertheless he was convinced that it came from outside the house—probably from beyond the window in the room.

He remembered that when he had entered the room he had noticed that it was the rearmost one of the apartment.

He could not move or turn his head to gain further information, but he concentrated all his senses into that one of hearing, and presently he heard the sound for the third time.

There was no mistaking it this time.

It was much plainer than before, and plainly proceeded, not from beyond the window, but from the window itself.

Suddenly there was a sharp click, and then he plainly heard the window move, and this was followed by a slow, scraping noise.

Somebody was raising the window from its bed in the casing. He knew that; and the knowledge told him that it would not be done thus silently, save by some person coming to his assistance.

"But," he thought, "this is the tenth floor of the building; at the rear of it, too. How could it be possible——"

He got no further in his conjectures, for there was a light step on the floor behind him, and the next instant the voice of Patsy whispered in his ear:

"It's Patsy."

Ah, what a welcome sound that whisper was to the detective.

, with what joy he felt the touch of the keen of Patsy's knife against the cords which bound to the chair.

a moment he was free, and with Patsy's assist- for he was stiff after his long experience in the he rose to his feet.

s first move was to feel in his pockets, and his sparkled with pleasure when he discovered that captors had disturbed nothing. His pistols had even been removed.

"There are ten of them, at least, Patsy," he said, ently, "and we have got a good half hour for me cover my strength and wit. She said she would one an hour, and she will keep her word."

"I wish I had known it," said Patsy. "I might released you that much sooner; but I waited out- thinking that she might return again at any mo- ."

"What! Were you outside all the time?"

"Well, I don't know as it was all the time, but I there while she was making love to you. Sure, I ught it was Miss Carmen herself until she put the t of the dagger against your windpipe. Then I w the difference. What was she trying to do?"

"Never mind that now, Patsy. Tell me how you there?"

"By the fire escape. The law makes them put one back of each building, doesn't it?"

"To be sure."

"Well, you will remember that I read the letter got from that fellow Puente."

"Yes."

"So, you see, I knew the number of the apartment re you were going. About nine o'clock, soon after had gone, the bell rang, and I found Miss Carmen e door. She told me all about her fears about and she wanted me to come here instanter to help

nd so you came."

"Not quite that. I told her what my orders were— main where I was, at least until midnight, for mum; but she made such a row about it that I promised her that if you were not back by eleven, I would start. Then she made me promise that I would stop at her door when I started, so she could be sure that I had gone. It was that promise which did the business."

"How so?"

"Because when I went there at eleven, she wasn't there, and, what's more, she hadn't been back to the house since she went across the street to see me at nine."

"You knew, then, that something was wrong."

"Sure I did. I knew that some deviltry was afoot, and the thing I suspected was that you had been called away on a wild-goose chase in order to clear the coast for somebody to get away with Carmen; and I knew that only one person—her own sister—would be interested in doing that."

"Well, Patsy, what did you do then?"

"I came directly to this hotel. I knew if I sent up my card it would be no sort of use. I knew if I made any row downstairs that I would put my foot in it bad, if this business of yours did happen to be legitimate, and I figured that there was only one thing for me to do. I did that one thing."

"You got to the fire escape, somehow, and so got to these back windows."

"I went out and managed to buy a piece of rope of a druggist; he found it for me in his cellar somewhere. Then I came back here with the rope wound around my body, under my coat. I got into the elevator as bold as you please, and went to the top floor. Then I moseyed around till I discovered the way to the roof. The door was fastened, but I picked the lock, and locked it again behind me. The rest of it was easy."

"Not so very easy, Pat. It is rather high up, isn't it?"

"Fourteen stories; but there is a fire escape on the thirteenth, and I easily let myself down to that. Afterward, I had only to climb down the ladders, one at a time, until I was on the tenth floor; and I knew where to find the window I wanted, for I had taken the precaution of that before I went after the rope. This accom-

ment is one thousand and twenty, and, of course, it is directly over 120; see?"

"You did well, Patsy."

"But I haven't an idea where Miss Carmen is."

"She is here."

"Well, anyhow, I came just in time, didn't I?"

"Just in time."

"You were tied up, fast enough, all right, eh?"

"They had me where I could not move—in fact, just where we will have them, before the night is over."

"I'm thinking about that, chief."

"Well, what about it?"

"I'm thinking that Inez will do something to hurt Miss Carmen while we are fighting it out with the gang. If Inez sees that it is all up with her plans, she won't hesitate to run a knife into her sister's heart, will she?"

"You are right, Patsy. Something must be done——"

He ceased speaking abruptly, for there was the sound of approaching footfalls in the hallway.

CHAPTER IX.

BEYOND THE BOLTED DOOR.

Patsy looked to his chief for instructions how to act in the emergency which now seemed inevitable. The footsteps were plainly approaching the door of the room where the two detectives were exchanging confidences, and discovery seemed unavoidable.

There, upon the floor around the chair where Nick Carter had been bound and helpless, were the several ropes which Patsy had cut from his arms and legs.

Behind them was the open window leading to the fire escape.

It must not be supposed that Nick Carter feared the result of a general conflict with the desperadoes in that apartment, although he and Patsy were so terribly outnumbered. He was thoroughly armed, as the reader already knows. Not one of his weapons had been taken from him, and he had four revolvers: the two which he always wore in his sleeves for use in emergency, and the two larger ones which he car in his pockets.

Patsy was provided in the same complete mann so that each of them possessed twenty bullets wh they could fire with a rapidity and accuracy that almost unthinkable.

But that half hour alone in the room with I Navarro had convinced the detective that the wom was mad. He had not a doubt of it; and there is ne any possibility of foretelling what an insane per may do.

It would have seemed best in the beginning—t is, as soon as Patsy relieved him of his bonds—to h sent the lad back into the hotel by way of the escape, and by telephone to have summoned the serves from the station house, and thus to have c tured the entire aggregation of crooks that was sembled in the apartment; and he had thought of t when Patsy first appeared.

But there was Carmen!

Carmen was a prisoner in the hands of her ins sister, who would doubtless murder her at the fi alarm, for it was plain to Nick Carter that Inez, her imagination, attributed every ill, and every mis tune with which she had met, to Carmen.

It is true that she had resented the insult offered sister, and had stabbed the man, perhaps fatally, was guilty of it; but it was also true, according to detective's method of reasoning, that she would w equal sang froid plunge a similar weapon into C men's heart.

Nick Carter thought rapidly when the sound those footsteps fell upon his ears; and the result of reasoning was to the effect that Patsy and he m fight the battle out alone and unaided, and that c of them must manage in some way to get between C men and her enemies, at the beginning of the fight.

The door from the dining room into the hall ope in such a way that there was a recess behind it, tween the sideboard and the wall, and toward spot he leaped with sudden energy.

"Under the table, Patsy!" he ordered, as he sp away; and so it happened that almost as soon a

ing noise fell upon their ears, Patsy had con- himself, and Nick was ensconced behind the which was about to be thrown open.

k had no doubt that it was Inez who was re- g, too impatient to await the expiration of the our of solitude for the detective she had prom-

d yet, the footsteps seemed heavier than hers have been.

reover, he thought that they seemed to falter as drew nearer, as if the approaching person were ubt of some kind.

t he had not long to wait to know the solution puzzle.

e footsteps halted just outside the door. There n instant of silence, and then a gentle tapping st the panel.

this, of course, the detective made no response; er a moment, the tapping was repeated.

ll neither the detective nor his assistant made any nse, and thus, after the tapping was again re- l with the same result, the knob of the door rat- as if a hand had been placed upon it; and then ed.

the door opened, slowly, but surely, an inch me, and Nick heartily wished that he had thought ough to turn down the lights before concealing if.

feared the consequences of that peeping inquiry he room; he feared the outcry which was almost o follow the discovery that he was no longer a er in the chair, and he feared the consequences rmen, of a general conflict precipitated before s ready for it.

stood ready, with his right hand upraised and ing his revolver so that he could use the butt of it iking, to silence the approaching individual as as the head appeared through the doorway; but was always the chance that the owner of the ght have time to cry out and thus give the the others in the apartment, before the blow all.

The left hand of the individual on the other side of it had grasped the door, and Nick could see the four fingers as they reached around it.

He knew, the instant his eyes fell upon those fingers, that they did not belong to Inez, and in that instant he conjectured that, for some reason, the person who was there believed that she was still in the dining room.

For several seconds the hand remained motionless where it was, as if the owner of it was afraid to look into the room.

Then it moved downward a little, and the top of a head appeared.

There was not much to strike at; merely the black-haired cranium of a burly man—one of the eight who had been seated around the table earlier in the evening, doubtless; but, nevertheless, there was enough to hit.

The butt of the revolver fell with crushing force.

It came in contact with the shock of black hair and the hard head underneath it, with a thud which, by contrast with the previous silence, was startlingly distinct.

But it fell surely, heavily and straight; and the man who was its victim uttered no sound whatever as he pitched forward into the room.

Even then the noise of his falling body might have alarmed the others, had not the detective prevented it; but his left hand shot forward, almost simultaneously with the falling of the right one; it grasped the shock of hair, and it held the limp and senseless body of the man suspended for an instant, after which he was lowered gently to the floor.

Instantly the detective dragged the body inside the room and closed the door.

The victim of his blow was one of the men who had been seated around the table.

Nick, with Patsy's assistance, bound his ankles and wrists together, and gagged him, with the ropes which had been cut from his own body; then they shoved the inanimate form under the table.

"There are not so many out there as there were," said Nick, grimly.

"One less, anyhow," replied Patsy.

"Wait here," said Nick; and he passed swiftly to the door, listened there a moment, then opened it gently, passed through into the hallway and closed it behind him.

There was a dim light in the hall. It shone from a gas jet which was half turned down, and which was also rendered still more dim by a red globe which covered it.

At the further end of the hall—in the room into which the detective had been admitted when he called—he could hear the low murmur of voices, and he stole forward on tiptoe, as silently as a shadow.

The door in front of him was slightly ajar, and he dropped upon his hands and knees, then crouched until his face was close to the floor, the better to see and hear without the likelihood of being either seen or heard.

He discovered that the room was brilliantly lighted.

Six of the men, whose faces he remembered, were grouped around a couch at the far side of the room, and the seventh—Ramon del Puente it was—was stretched upon his back, on the couch, apparently dead.

There were bandages around his neck, and from somewhere a sheet had been procured, and this had been wadded into a bulk and packed against the wounded man's throat; but, notwithstanding all these precautions, the bandages as well as the sheet were saturated with blood.

"She did her work well that time," was the detective's mental comment. "The fellow has bled to death, and his friends have not been able to stop it. But where is Inez?"

Where indeed?

She was nowhere in sight, and it was evident to the detective that they had not seen her since they left her in the dining room with him.

And where was Carmen?

There was no sign anywhere of her.

Nick drew away from the door and raised himself to his feet again.

"Those fellows will wait there a suitable time for the return of the chap they sent to the dining room," he mused, "and when he does not return, they will send another. I must look out for that. We can cope with the second, as we did the first; but, after that, there must be a fight—if these fellows have got any fight left in them, and I don't imagine they will have much. In the meantime, I must find Carmen and Inez."

The apartment was of peculiar shape—almost fan shaped, in fact. The dining room, in which he had been made a prisoner, might be called the apex of the fan—that is, the handle; the front of the apartment spread out in such a manner that there were four rooms abreast of one another.

The men upon whom he had just looked were in the room that was furthest to the left, so that there were two others to the right of it; it was, in reality, the library of the apartment.

The middle room was the parlor, and Nick stole along the hall with great care until he could operate the door which led to that room; and this he pulled open, slowly and silently.

It was in darkness, but sufficient light shone in from the outside to permit him to see that it was unoccupied.

Inez was not there. Carmen was not there.

"They must be in the other room, then; the end room," he mused. "God grant that Inez has not already wreaked her insane vengeance upon Carmen!"

The mere thought of it added to his haste, and he reached the door almost instantly.

As he had tried the other one, he tried this; but it was locked on the inside.

But there was a keyhole, and he pressed his ear against it, for fortunately the key had been removed from the opposite side, and the space there-

him a reasonably clear view of the interior of him.

first glance was enough, for he almost cried out in horror at what he saw there.

CHAPTER X.

A MAD WOMAN'S MANIA.

at he saw there, was this:

huge, leather-covered chair had been drawn to the ." of the room so that the light from a cluster incandescent burners in the chandelier would fall upon the face of a person seated there.

ted in the chair so that she was facing the door through which the detective was peering, was Carmen. collar had been removed, and two or three buttons of her waist were loosed at the throat, so that the whiteness of her neck was plainly in view.

head was thrown back against the leather cushion of the chair, and a rope had been wound round and her body so that she was held in an immovable position.

re was another rope around each wrist, and each tied to the chair so that she could not raise her or move them. Doubtless her feet were fastened in the same manner, but Nick's range of vision did not permit him to be certain of that.

men's eyes were open and staring, and she seemed perfectly conscious. The drug with which she had been stupefied earlier in the evening, had lost its power, evidently, for Nick could see that she was entirely in the possession of her senses.

ling on the floor beside her was Inez.

was in such a position that the side of her face was visible to Nick Carter; and he could see that she pulled a low table within reach of her hand, on which she held an artist's palette in one hand, while in the other there gleamed a dagger exactly like the one with which she had threatened the detective an hour earlier.

While Nick looked upon this scene, Inez dipped the point of the dagger into some substance on the palette, and then she leaned forward toward her sister, gloatingly.

"Wait, Inez," said Carmen, calmly, "wait. You will be sorry all your life if you do this awful thing you contemplate now."

"Sorry? No, I will not," replied Inez, chuckling. "I will be glad all my life. Two women, as beautiful as you and I are, cannot live in the same world. You should know that as well as I."

"But, Inez, think what you are about to do. Think!"

"Think! Think! Think! Haven't I thought and thought until I am wild with thinking. I will think no more. I am here to spoil your beauty. To make you hideous. You know my art with the ink; I have told you about it many times."

"Don't do this thing, Inez. Please don't."

"Why? Shall I tell you why you don't want it done? Because you fear that Nick Carter will not love you any more, after I have made you hideous. And shall I tell you why I will do it? Because I do not wish him to love you."

"Don't do it, Inez; please don't."

Inez laughed aloud.

"Fool!" she cried. "Do you think I will stop now? Do you think I will hesitate when I have you in my power? I am going to mark you with the coils of a hideous serpent. I shall begin it here"—and she pressed the point of the dagger against Carmen's tender flesh.

"I will begin here, at the tail of the snake, and I will coil it round and round your white neck to your ears; I will bring it across each cheek, across your forehead, over the bridge of your Grecian nose, and I will dis-

tend the jaws of it so that your rosebud mouth will resemble the distended jaws of an angry rattler."

She laughed aloud again; and Carmen shuddered.

"Do you suppose that Nick Carter will care to kiss you then?" cried Inez. "Do you think that he will relish touching his lips to the pictured fangs of a poisonous serpent? Do you not know that he will fly to me? That he will turn away from you in disgust?

"Listen, Carmen"—and she allowed the point of the dagger to fall again—"listen, while I tell you what I have already done to him—to Nick Carter. He is out there in the dining room, bound to a chair where he cannot escape, and where he cannot move any more than you can move. I kissed him on the lips, and it made me mad, mad, mad! Oh, I know it. I am mad—but as you will see, there is a method in my madness. I kissed his lips, and it made me mad.

"Then I drew my dagger—not this one, but the mate to it—and I pressed it—so; only a little harder than that, against his throat. I told him that I was going to kiss him again, and that if he did not kiss me in return, I would drive the dagger home, through his throat, just as I stabbed Del Puente, who is bleeding to death in the library. I know, because I looked in there as I came to you.

"I told him if he did not kiss me in return, I would drive the dagger home, and he told me to drive it home and be—— He did not finish what he intended to say, because I kissed him. Then he told me that he would rather be tortured by red-hot pincers than by my lips, and I knew then that he was thinking of you. He would not have said that if it were not for your beauty—for the beauty which I am going to destroy forever.

"And then, Carmen, what do you think I did next?"

Carmen's only reply was to shudder and close her eyes.

"I will tell you," continued Inez. "I pressed the point of the dagger against his throat harder than I intended, so that it sank into the flesh——"

Carmen struggled and moaned. Then she uttered a half scream.

"Tut, tut!" said Inez. "I did not hurt him much, but the point of my dagger drew blood from his throat, and the sight of it made me mad again. Ah! I was mad then.

"Do you know what I did? I fell upon him and I pressed my lips against the spot I had wounded to soothe the pain of it—just to soothe the pain of it. That was all I intended to do. But I got his blood upon my lips. His blood! Think of it! Think of the horror of it! Do you wonder that it drove me mad with joy? And then—ah!

"Carmen, call me mad if you will, but I have tasted his blood, and that is more than you have done. I have tasted his blood, and it makes him mine forever. You could not win him away from me now, even if you could not steal away your beauty with the ink and the point of my dagger.

"Do you know what I intend to do after I have put the snake around your neck? After I have pressed the jaws of the serpent across your red lips, do you know what I intend to do then? I will tell you.

"I shall return to the dining room where Nick Carter is awaiting me. He told me that he would look only of me while I was away. I shall go back to him after I have finished with you, and I will bring him here.

"You will be unconscious then, for the sting of the dagger-point, and the poison of the ink will paralyze you so that you will have fainted away; but you will recover, and I shall wait until you open your eyes.

"Then I will point my finger at you, and I will say to him:

"'There is Carmen. Look at her now. Where is all the beauty you worshiped?' And he will look

for you will be a hideous thing; and he will me. Then I will say:

ere, Nick Carter, is the beauty you love. Once, were two of us, so much alike that our own r did not know us one from the other. Now only one, and I am that one. You will love n no longer. You will love Inez; but if you e name as well as the face, then in the future I rget the name of Inez, and I will be Carmen.'"

is the soul, not the face, that he loves," mur- Carmen.

e soul! Bah! Who loves a soul, save a lot of us maniacs who prate of something they know g about, and worship it because it is a mystery. is only another form of idolatry. Men do not woman's soul. It is the body they love. The The beauty. The creature. The woman. love her for what the eye sees and what the feel, not saintliness. Wicked women are loved than good women, and that is why he will learn e me better than he has ever loved you.

t come! I must get to work. I am wasting

on't do it, Inez! Don't do it!" pleaded Carmen; nez laughed again.

h, yes," she said, "I will do it; never fear."

k Carter had thought a dozen times of throwing lf against the door and bursting it from the s, for he knew that he had strength enough to do but it was a dangerous proceeding to undertake Inez knelt there in front of her victim, with the dagger in her hand.

thought of every expedient that was possible; ly one that appeared to be practicable appealed

then, just as he decided to put it into practice, a touched him on the elbow, and he knew that at his side.

"Be ready, Patsy!" he whispered.

Then he tapped gently against the door, still keeping his eye at the keyhole.

Inez started and turned her head when the tapping upon the door disturbed her, and the detective repeated it.

"Who is there?" she demanded; but without rising.

"I," replied Nick, muffling his voice so that it was unrecognizable.

"Who are you?" demanded Inez, still without rising.

"Ramon," said Nick.

"Faugh! You are not Ramon. He is dead."

"Nick Carter," whispered Nick, through the keyhole, shrilly.

Inez started to her feet, then paused, hesitating.

"What of him?" she demanded.

"Open, and I will tell you," whispered Nick; in the same unrecognizable utterance. "The cord around his neck; the wound in his throat; bleeding; unconscious——"

Inez uttered a cry.

The dagger in her hand clattered to the floor, and she sprang like a tigress toward the door.

In an instant she had thrown it open and appeared there, the picture of a roused fury.

The instant she appeared, Nick seized her in his arms, wrapping his own around her so that hers were pinioned against her sides.

"Patsy, quick!" he exclaimed. "Cover her mouth so that she cannot scream."

And Patsy, ever ready with expedients, tore off his coat and threw it over her head.

But Inez was not easily conquered, even then.

She struggled and fought like a young demon, and with the fury of a tigress.

Her strength was the strength of a madwoman—like the strength of a [illegible] and as

powerful as Nick Carter was, it required all his wonderful skill and muscular talent, and all the aid which Patsy could offer, to subdue her.

But they conquered her at last; but not until they had forced her inside the room and closed the door so that the noise of the struggle could not penetrate to the room where the men were waiting—and not until Patsy had pulled pictures from the walls, and wound the wire cords taken from them, many times around her.

And all the time the struggle was in progress, Carmen looked upon it from her chair with wide-eyed comprehension.

And when it was over, and Inez, now apparently unconscious from the effects of her exertions, was laid upon a couch at one side of the room, Nick went to her and cut the bonds which held her.

"I knew that you would find a way," she whispered, when he raised her in his arms, and held her there for a moment; and then she closed her eyes resignedly, and Nick saw that she, also, had lapsed into unconsciousness.

"Poor child!" he murmured. "The strain of that scene must have been awful. She knew that her sister was mad, and she realized that there was no hope, unless I could get to her."

But he knew that there was no time to devote to her then.

"Come, Patsy," he said, "there is yet more to do."

They went out again into the hall, and passed along it to the room where Ramon del Puente was dead upon the couch; and as they passed through the half open door, the men that the six men who were left, had grouped themselves together in the center of the floor, and were just on the point of going to bed—in search of their guns.

The leader decided him wise to do

He kicked the door ajar with his foot, and crossed the threshold.

His revolvers were in his hands, and the muzzles of them were pointed at the astonished men.

"*Manos altos!*" he commanded in Spanish; which means "Hands up!" And there was that in his determined manner which compelled instant obedience.

Not one of them thought of resisting.

Their hands shot into the air with surprising unanimity, and Nick held them thus at bay, while Patsy performed the duty of confining them, one by one, with picture cords taken from the wall.

* * * * * * *

That, reader, completes the story of the madness of Inez Navarro, the criminal queen.

When the detective returned to the room where he had left her, he discovered that Carmen had already recovered, and that she had torn the bonds from her sister and was trying to restore her to consciousness.

But this could not be done.

Inez had mercifully died of the exertions of her struggle with the detectives. Her heart had failed to perform the extra work required of it in that struggle, and—she was dead.

Carruthers was never rescued. He went to the death chair as jauntily as he would have entered a theater, and his last words were:

"Tell Carter that he wins out; he does, really!"

THE END.

Old readers of Nick Carter, who are familiar with Nick's earliest adventures, will find a series of especial interest opening in next week's issue. New readers will find a part of Nick's adventures that have never before been disclosed to them.

You have all heard of Dr. Quartz, Nick's great and deadliest enemy. Dr. Quartz No. 2, who appears in next week's issue, is his brother, his equal in skill, his counterpart, his peer in every respect save in the eyes of the great detective.

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